

dominated by ruderal grassland with large numbers of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and wild rose *Rosa* spp. bushes as well as much bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg.. The sample for 15 June to 5 July from this trap contained a number of microlepidoptera and, because these records were not directly required for the ecological assessment, the specimens were tubed and put on one side until time became available for looking at them. The realisation that such free-time was unlikely to become available in the foreseeable future prompted me to pass the tube to David Manning, in his capacity as Bedfordshire Lepidoptera Recorder, with a note that the only way he was likely to get the records out of me was to look at the sample himself! Naturally, he rose magnificently to the occasion and very rapidly determined a list of 28 species by examination of genital characters. Amongst the material he looked at were two specimens of *O. lienigialis*, the first records for Bedfordshire.

According to Maitland Emmet's *Chart showing life history and habits of the British Lepidoptera* presented in volume 7 (2) of *The moths and butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* (Harley Books, Colchester), the larval foodplant of this species of plume moth is mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris*, with occasional records from *Leucanthemum vulgare* and *Solanum* spp. Mugwort was growing in plenty in the vicinity of the malaise trap at Luton Airport, as was *Solanum dulcamara*, and it is surely likely that the moth is breeding at this site.

It may also be worth mentioning, in passing, that I also recorded this plume moth at Rushey Mead Nature Reserve, North Essex recently, when a larva was swept from a mugwort plant growing by the gate against a busy main road. The two records together may suggest that this is an under-recorded moth, at least in this part of the country.

I am most grateful to David Manning for his generosity and efficiency in identifying my far from appealing malaise trap samples of micro moths preserved in alcohol.—COLIN W. PLANT, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3QP.

The return of *Aricia agestis* (D.&S.) (Lep.: Lycaenidae) to suburban north-west Kent and a comment on the other blue butterflies

In the early post-war years, suburban north-west Kent possessed four common species of blue butterfly, *A. agestis*, *Polyommatus icarus* (Rott.), *Plebejus argus* (L.) and *Celastrina argiolus* (L.), two soon to disappear and two to become comparatively rare. Although the last named has made a recovery, it remains less common than in the 1920s and 1930s. Today, *P. icarus* belies its vernacular name; it cannot be regarded as common even in the neighbouring countryside. In the 1930s, every bunker on Gravesend Golf Course, in a suburban setting, acted as a haven for a small complement of *icarus*. The distinct colonies of *P. argus* in disused sand pits and some small shallow depressions of similar origin, invariably possessed a carpet of hare's foot trefoil *Trifolium arvense* – possibly the larval foodplant. Bird's foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* was absent, or very little in evidence, in these locations

within Dartford or on its periphery, although the prolific colony of *P. argus* on the London Clay several miles to the east at Swanscombe Park flourished amidst an abundance of this plant. *A. agestis* was ubiquitous, generally to be observed singly or in small numbers, but sometimes in a limited area a vast number might be congregated. Thus, Chalmers-Hunt, 1961 (*Butterflies and Moths of Kent, Ent. Rec. 73*, Supplement p.107), records that scores could be seen in a field adjacent to Joydens Wood in 1946, and at Longfield in 1933 I found the butterfly in profusion in a recently disturbed field awaiting development.

On 1 August 1999, a very fresh male *A. agestis* attended the main flower border in my garden. It was fresh in appearance and gave ample opportunity to verify that it was not merely a well-marked female *P. icarus*. Its immediate origin was doubtless the abandoned paddock, grassy meadows or disused land adjacent to the end of my garden, whence come the occasional *P. icarus*.

In recent years, two atlases of the local distribution of butterflies to include this area have been published. Philp, 1993 (*The Butterflies of Kent, an atlas of their distribution*) shows *A. agestis* not recorded for the 10-kilometre square which includes Dartford, nor the one immediately to the east, stretching beyond Gravesend, with the exception of the tetrad embracing Swanscombe Park and the adjoining large chalk quarry. The period covered was 1981 to 1990. Plant, 1987 (*The Butterflies of the London Area*) covering a slightly shorter period in the 1980s, also has no records for these two 10km squares; both show the species present on the Chalk further south.— B.K. WEST, 36 Briar Road, Dartford, Kent DA5 2HN.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: It is most interesting to note the reappearance of *Aricia agestis* at a large number of localities in the south-east during the last few years – not only at traditional sites from where it had apparently disappeared, but also at relatively new sites which clearly did not have the butterfly years ago as they did not then exist. Particularly affected seems to be the East Thames Corridor – essentially the Thames-side areas of Kent and Essex – where the past dumping of pulverised fuel ash (PFA) has created a base-rich substrate and where the unique micro-climate favours a nationally important assemblage of aculeate Hymenoptera and other thermophilic insects. However, records extend westwards right through the heart of London to ruderal sites in the City and beyond. I have been gathering records of *A. agestis* from this area over the past couple of years and would be very keen to hear from anyone who can supply further information, to include both location and first date of appearance plus, if possible, a note of whether the species was previously recorded and, if so, the date of the last known record.

COLIN W. PLANT

Unusual food plant for *Epiphyas postvittana* (Walker) (Lep.: Tortricidae)

In late September 1999 I was brought two larvae spinning the leaves of a cannabis plant *Cannabis sativa* L. growing in Lymington, Hampshire. The owner of the plant was in high dudgeon at the insects' temerity. The plant was aptly growing in a pot,